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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 1391st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 13 August 1991, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:	Mr. ALARCON DE QUESADA (Vice-Chairman)	(Cuba)
later:	Mr. SLABY (Vice-Chairman)	(Czechoslovakia)

- Special Committee decision of 15 August concerning Puerto Rico

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Alarcon de Quesada (Cuba), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE DECISION OF 15 AUGUST 1990 CONCERNING PUERTO RICO (A/AC.109/L.1768 AND L.1769) (continued)

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Alberto Navarro Suárez (Jóvenes Pro Estadidad) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I call on Mr. Navarro Suárez.

Mr. NAVARRO SUAREZ (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Alberto Navarro Suárez, and I am appearing before the Committee on Decolonization on behalf of the organization Jovenes Pro Estadidad, which is not affiliated to any political party in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rican youth, like the majority of our people, support our remaining joined to the United States of America. While we are proud of the United States citizenship granted to us in 1917, we are also proud and loyal Puerto Ricans.

In operative paragraph 2 of an important resolution adopted by the Committee on Decolonization on 30 August 1973, members stated the following:

> "To request of the Government of the United States of America that it refrain from adopting any measure that could prevent the people from exercising fully and freely its inalienable right to self-determination and independence, as well as its economic, social and other rights, and particularly that it avoid any violation of those rights by corporate entities under their jurisdiction."

(Mr. Navarro Suárez)

Eighteen years after the adoption of the resolution, the United States Congress is denying us that opportunity by not approving legislation that would allow consultation with the people of Puerto Rico in a plebiscite on their preference as to commonwealth, statehood or independence.

It is appropriate to point out that, at the time when the President of the United States, George Bush, had made a commitment to the Puerto Rican people in his initial message to the Congress of the United States in January 1989, recommending that there be a plebiscite so that our people could freely choose the status it preferred, he also said that he personally supported statehood for Puerto Rico.

Once congressional talks began, and the plebiscite legislation was ratified, the three leaders of our people's political parties endorsed the congressional action in the hope that the result would be a full commitment to adopting legislation in the House of Representatives and the Senate in order to respect the will of the people in consultations. After two years and two months in which there were meetings and public hearings in the United States and Puerto Rico, the United States Congress, through a Committee, has taken the decision not to adopt the plebiscite legislation.

By that action, it has denied us the right to choose freely our political status. In other words, we are being denied the right to self-determination because of political interests and perhaps because of the personal interests of certain Congressmen. Moreover, by not adopting the plebiscite legislation, the Congress has turned its back on the resolution adopted by the Special Committee in 1973.

No one can have any doubt here in the United Nations that Puerto Rico is a country that has yet to achieve full sovereignty. Our sovereignty is in the

(Mr. Navarro Suárez)

hands of the United States Congress, not in the patrimony of our people. The report on one of the bills, number 712 of the Senate, reaffirms that Puerto Rico is under the sovereignty of the Federal Government, that we are a non-incorporated Territory and that the establishment of the Commonwealth, approved in 1952, did not resolve the debate on status. It recognizes that the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, and that it thus obtained sovereignty over the island. Moreover, it acknowledges the need to hold a referendum monitored by the Federal Government in order to guarantee the integrity of the process.

The report on that same bill states that Puerto Rico's political status is an internal matter of the United States that does not require any international intervention. None the less, the United States is not acting. In view of this situation, Jóvenes Pro Estadidad is now appearing before the Committee. It is our understanding that the Committee on Decolonization has authority to hear the case of Puerto Rico. In 1972 the Committee adopted the first resolution that clearly places the case of Puerto Rico under its purview. The overwhelming majority of the Puerto Rican people is aware of the colonial situation in which we are living.

The United States must put an end to our colonialism. It is not only the duty of Congressmen vis-à-vis democracy and justice, but it is also their duty to wash from the face of their homeland the filth that the world is casting at it, because imperialism is maintaining the people of Puerto Rico in a state of political inferiority. This makes our country the main colony of the most powerful empire, and the oldest colony in the entire western hemisphere.

Throughout our history, statehood advocates have wanted to resolve the political problem of Puerto Rico without having to appear before the

(Mr. Navarro Suárez)

Committee. None the less, the United States Congress is responsible for our being here. We therefore ask you to exercise your leadership, and request Congress to authorize a plebiscite so that we can express ourselves and so that the people of Puerto Rico can be granted their wishes. That plebiscite, once authorized, should be observed and monitored by the United Nations.

(Mr. Navarro Suárez)

The principle of self-determination of peoples is an outstanding part of the history of political freedom in the twentieth century. In its resolution 1514 (XV), adopted on 14 December 1960, the General Assembly recognizes that principle. The Democratic and Republican parties of the United States also recognize it in their political platforms. If this is the case, then we wonder why the United States Congress is denying us the principle of self-determination.

The process of federated statehood is a mechanism of decolonization, characterized from the outset by flexibility, variety and adaptability to the specific circumstances of each State. Statehood is a formula of government consisting of permanent union with the United States through which Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans acquire full rights as citizens. They acquire the right to vote for the President, a right that we do not now have. They acquire the right to be represented in Congress, which formulates the legislation that governs our destiny - another right that we do not now have. To live under a regime in which one does not participate is to live under a colonial regime.

Statehood means that we cease to be second-class citizens. We want to be first-class citizens of the United States with all the rights and prerogatives that this involves.

It is not enough to know that we are right. The important thing is to do what we must to claim that right for over 3.5 million Puerto Ricans who live on our small island, and who want once and for all to decide on their own political status. We have confidence in the Committee on Decolonization. It has authority over our case. Please exercise that authority; Puerto Ricans will be grateful to you for it.

(Mr. Navarro Suárez)

Mr. Navarro Suárez withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Marco Rigau (Comisión de lo Juridídico, Senado de Puerto Rico) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I call on Mr. Rigau.

Mr. RIGAU (interpretation from Spanish): We are here really for two reasons: first, to see how the Committee can help Puerto Rico in the process of self-determination of the Puerto Rican people to develop its political status; and secondly, to assist the Committee in carrying out its duty of ensuring the implementation of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) - the resolution that gives the Committee its reason for being and guides its actions.

We welcome the initiative of the Government of Venezuela and of its representatives, in this year of important changes in the world, for presenting a draft resolution on the issue of Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/L.1769), whose main thrusts we support. After reading it carefully, we would like to make the following comments.

First, in the first preambular paragraph the Special Committee recalls, inter alia, "the resolutions and decisions ... concerning Puerto Rico", that is, all the procedural substantive actions. As jurists, we would stress that that includes the important resolution of 12 September 1978, in which the Committee expresses its understanding that, in the light of resolution 1514 (XV), Puerto Rico has the option of future independence, as well as the commonwealth option within the framework of international law.

Secondly, the draft resolution should perhaps include a reference to the right of Puerto Rico at this time - even without changes in its status - to participate internationally as the nation that it is.

(Mr. Rigau)

Thirdly, we should like to point out that in the sixth preambular paragraph, in which the lack of progress in the legislative process of the United States Congress is deplored, it should be pointed out - and justifiably so, in my view - that the House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill and that the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and the full session of the House itself fulfilled their duty. Unfortunately, it has been held up in the Senate.

Fourthly, we would do well to include as an annex to our presentation here the extremely important agreement of 9 August 1991 of the leaders of the three Puerto Rican political parties involved in the electoral process, who represent at least 95 per cent of the Puerto Rican population. This agreement or declaration, which I should like to submit now, was signed by Governor Rafael Hernández Colón, who took the initiative of inviting the other two party leaders, for which he should be praised, as should the leader of the New Progressive Party, Mr. Pedro Rosselló, who appeared before the Committee yesterday, and Mr. Rubén Berríos Martínez, the other party leader. We should also like to congratulate these two party leaders for the agreement, which should be recognized in this year's resolution, because it is a Puerto Rican initiative and should prevail over any other initiative. It reads as follows:

"The leaders of the three political parties of Puerto Rico, Governor Rafael Hernández Colón, Dr. Pedro Roselló and Mr. Rubén Berríos Martínez, have agreed as follows:

1. The right of the people to vote on any change in political status shall be recognized;

(Mr. Rigau)

2. The inalienable right of the people to self-determination, to choose among alternatives of equal political dignity, based on the sovereignty of the people, shall be recognized, and shall not be subject to the plenary authority of the Congress under the territorial clause.

The legitimacy of these formulas shall be determined by the United Nations and by the United States Congress;

3. The terms of elected officials shall be fixed;

4. Efforts shall be made to ensure fairer representation in the Legislature;

5. The means shall be identified of validly defining and incorporating into the Constitution of the Commonwealth terms concerning the identity, culture and citizenship of the people of Puerto Rico;

6. A group of constitutional specialists representing the three parties shall examine these matters and make recommendations to the leaders, upon which the leaders shall hold consultations with the decision-making bodies of their respective parties;

7. The parties to this agreement shall meet on Saturday, 17 August, at 10 a.m. with a view to finalizing these matters."

The leaders will thus meet in four days on the initiative of the leader of our party, the Governor of Puerto Rico. The declaration has been patriotically endorsed by the leaders of the other two parties, whom we also wish to congratulate.

Fifthly, with regard to the draft resolution submitted by Venezuela, paragraph 2 states:

"Trusts that the United States Congress will continue the legislative process to enable the people of Puerto Rico ...".

(Mr. Rigau)

While we support this position, we believe that Congress should do so after the Puerto Rican initiative bears fruit. As it is Puerto Rican, that initiative should be given more weight. Subsequently, Congress should continue its work, which has remained unfinished in the last two and one half years.

(Mr. Rigau)

Sixthly, the Congress should clearly tell the people of Puerto Rico, without any ambiguity, what options the Government of the United States is in a position to negotiate so that the discussion on the island is not of illusory options that cannot in fact be implemented, and so that the people of Puerto Rico, which, under international law must be informed, can, as part of the self-determination process, be aware of developments, and not engage in sterile debate, which divides us as a people and which has already lasted longer than it should.

As members know, this process began in Puerto Rico and in Washington in 1989. At the outset, it was an initiative of Governor Hernández Colón, introduced on 2 January 1989 in the inaugural message of his current term. Subsequently, it was an initiative of the President of the United States, George Bush, voiced in his message to Congress when he requested the approval of legislation on a plebiscite.

For the first time we have a case where there are claims from the three political parties, the President of the United States and the government programmes of the two United States political parties - the Democrats and the Republicans - and where one of the two legislative branches - the House of Representatives - approved a bill that subsequently failed after being examined by the other. Moreover, for many years the Committee has called upon the United States to carry out a process of self-determination for Puerto Rico. This is to say that we are at a moment when nearly all the parties in the decision-making process have acted; only one party has yet to take action.

It seems clear that that party, the United States Senate, has not discharged its duty. To that end, instead of just criticizing the Senate, we should urge it to fulfil its obligation. The Committee can help in this

(Mr. Rigau)

regard, not merely by adopting resolutions that reaffirm principles that we all support, but also by pointing to solutions to the problem. Efforts should be made to break the deadlock in which we now find ourselves by recognizing the progress achieved and requesting those who have yet to take action to do so. The Committee can help in this process, and we are pleased that this is the case. I am sure that both the United States and the people of Puerto Rico would be pleased if the Committee cooperated with both parties in this process so as to ensure that in future the territorial clause will not be applied to us and that we will be decolonized. Let this debate be a thing of the past so that Puerto Rico can continue on its path towards solving its own problems and fulfilling its own destiny.

Mr. Rigau withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Luis Vega Ramos (Juventud Autonomista) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I call on Mr. Vega Ramos.

Mr. VEGA RAMOS (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Luis Vega Ramos, and I am appearing before the Committee on behalf of Juventud Autonomista de Puerto Rico. Ours is an organization committed to the defence of the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and the full exercise of its sovereignty, through the implementation of a formula of political association between the peoples of Puerto Rico and the United States of America.

In 1952 Puerto Rico drafted its own Constitution, which exists today as a monument to the democratic values that characterize us as a people, and which

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created the current Commonwealth relationship as an initial step in the exercise of our right to self-determination.

In 1953 the President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, stated to the General Assembly that if the people of Puerto Rico, through the legislative assembly, were to request changes or improvements towards more complete or even absolute independence, he would recommend to Congress that they be granted. With that guarantee by the President of the United States, and having studied the new status, the General Assembly adopted resolution 748 (VIII).

During these 39 years of Commonwealth status, the people of Puerto Rico have on many occasions expressed their interest in coming to an agreement with the United States on changes in the terms of their relationship. None the less, all these attempts have been frustrated by inaction on the part of the Government of the United States regarding Puerto Rican claims and by a refusal to honour the international commitment it contracted with the Organization in 1953. Our progress towards the full exercise of self-determination was therefore interrupted.

Subsequently, in 1972 and under resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960, the Special Committee assumed jurisdiction over the case of Puerto Rico, and

> "... reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence."

In 1978, owing to a historic consensus between pro-autonomy and pro-independence advocates, the Committee made headway by making it clear that

> "... any form of free association between Puerto Rico and the United States should be on equal political conditions in order to respect fully

(Mr. Vega Ramos)

the provisions of the resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and of applicable international law, and should recognize the sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico."

It was therefore clear for the first time which two substantive alternatives were available to the people of Puerto Rico in order to work towards a final settlement of their political problem.

Since 1989 the people of Puerto Rico and the Government of the United States have been involved in a process of negotiation and consultation. Even President Bush has expressed his support for the right of our people to choose its own future. The United States Congress studied a bill to consult with the people on their preference of political status. The three political parties in Puerto Rico supported the initiative and participated actively throughout the process. Unfortunately, the Senate did not adopt any legislation for the holding of a plebiscite, and that historic initiative, just like all earlier initiatives, failed.

None the less, we Puerto Ricans have not ceased in our efforts to solve our political problem. In November 1990 the Partido Popular Democrático, a defender of the Commonwealth, adopted a historic resolution that clearly affirms the parameters for the development of the current commonwealth association between Puerto Rico and the United States. That resolution clearly sets forth the pro-autonomy requirements of sovereignty and of non-subordination of the new Commonwealth to the plenary authority of the United States Congress under the territorial clause. We are attaching a copy of that resolution as part of our statement.

On 5 April 1991 the people of Puerto Rico declared Spanish to be the official language of the Commonwealth, thus emphatically reaffirming our

(Mr. Vega Ramos)

cultural identity and our historic personality as a Latin American and Caribbean people.

On Friday, 9 August 1991, a historic step was taken towards a permanent settlement of our political problem. On that day - as has been stated by Senator Marco Antonio Rigau - the leaders of the three political parties of our country signed a joint declaration, which states in paragraph 2 - and I should like to repeat it once again so as to highlight the point -:

"The inalienable right of the people to self-determination, to choose among alternatives of equal political dignity, based on the sovereignty of the people, shall be recognized, and shall not be subject to the plenary authority of the Congress under the territorial clause. The legitimacy of these formulas shall be determined by the United Nations and by the United States Congress."

There can be no doubt that we Puerto Ricans are sparing no effort to exercise our right to self-determination. We have reaffirmed our cultural identity and our status as a Caribbean and Latin American people, and have clearly stated, as a people, apart from political and partisan loyalties, the nature of political non-subordination to the Congress of the United States in any future relationship between Puerto Rico and that country. It is up to you, the United Nations, to demand of the Government of the United States - and particularly the Senate - that it honour the commitment contracted towards us and, through the Organization, towards the international community in 1953.

We cannot wait any longer. Puerto Rico deserves to be spoken to clearly and honestly. Real alternatives should be separated from imaginary ones. The United Nations must make it clear to the United States and to Puerto Rico that, under international law, there are only two acceptable options that will resolve our situation: commonwealth or independence.

(Mr. Vega Ramos)

Furthermore, the Congress of the United States has the obligation to tell our people in no uncertain terms whether it intends not to comply with international law by integrating a distinct nationality - our Puerto Rican nationality - into the United States union as a state.

(Mr. Vega Ramos)

We Puerto Ricans are doing our share in the process of exercising our right to self-determination and full sovereignty. Sectors in the United States have also done their work. The United Nations and the Special Committee have contributed broadly in the past towards resolving our political problem. In our view, the draft resolution introduced by Venezuela would be an excellent statement on the part of the Committee, provided that it takes note of the historic agreement concluded by the three leaders of the Puerto Rican parties to which I have referred, and that it emphasizes that the arrangements among which the people of Puerto Rico must ultimately make their choice are based on the sovereignty of our people. We are confident that at this important time for our island, in which all Puerto Ricans have resolved to eradicate all vestiges of colonialism and of Puerto Rico's real or apparent political subordination, the Committee and the Organization will act in ways commensurate with the times, with the best interests of the people of Puerto Rico in mind.

Mr. Vega Ramos withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Carlos Vizcarrondo Irizarry (PROELA) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I call on Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry.

Mr. VIZCARRONDO IRIZARRY (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Carlos Vizcarrondo Irizarry, and I am President of the pro-autonomy PROELA organization. I should like to dedicate my statement to the memory of Doña Inez Mendoza, the widow of Muñoz Marin, the eternal First Lady of Puerto Rico, who was committed to the decolonization of Puerto Rico, on the first anniversary of her death.

(Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry)

We are appearing before the Special Committee for the fourteenth consecutive year on behalf of PROELA. Our organization is committed to the development of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in free association with the United States of America. Our ideal of autonomy as a decolonization alternative has been recognized in General Assembly resolutions 748 (VIII) of 1953 and 1541 (XV) of 1960.

The Special Committee endorsed their validity, together with independence, under resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960, when it adopted its resolution dated 12 September 1978.

In our statement last year we reported to the Committee on the consideration of legislation in the United States Congress aimed at the holding of a plebiscite in Puerto Rico. This year we must inform the Committee that that consultation will not take place, because Congress did not adopt the aforementioned legislation.

A group of Senators, including seven Republicans and three Democrats belonging to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which was considering the draft plebiscite, joined in voting against Bill S 244 introduced by Senator Bennett Johnston in order to block its adoption. Their objections to the draft were based on clear, unmistakable prejudice against the Puerto Rican people, owing to cultural and linguistic differences between Puerto Rico and the United States.

So deep-rooted is the Puerto Rican national identity and its cultural characteristics, that the Legislature of Puerto Rico recently adopted a law that stipulates that the Spanish language shall be the official language of Puerto Rico in the three branches of Government of the Commonwealth.

Another fundamental reason that this group of Republican Senators rejected the plebiscite bill was the Republican Party's fear, that were Puerto

(Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry)

Rico to become a state of the Union, it would elect a Puerto Rican congressional delegation favouring the Democratic Party in its composition, and this would strengthen even more the Democratic Party's majority in the House and Senate.

We believe that the non-adoption by Congress of legislation allowing consultations on Puerto Rico's status constitutes a flagrant violation on the part of the United States Government of the Puerto Rican people's right to self-determination, a right that is enshrined in the Charter of which the United States is a signatory.

In view of this procedural impasse created by the failure of Congress to adopt a plebiscite law, the leaders of the three main political parties in Puerto Rico reached a preliminary agreement in a historic meeting held on Friday, 9 August 1991, in la Fortaleza, in which it was agreed that there would be a referendum to propose to the people the following changes in the Constitution of Puerto Rico:

First, to recognize the right of the people of Puerto Rico to vote on any change in their political status;

Secondly, to recognize the inalienable right of the people to self-determination and to choose among alternatives of equal political dignity based on the sovereignty of the people and not subject to plenary authority of Congress under the Territorial Clause;

Thirdly, to determine a way of defining and validly incorporating in the Constitution of the Commonwealth references to the identity, culture and citizenship of the people of Puerto Rico.

The purpose of these constitutional amendments is to offer some basic guarantees to the Puerto Rican people under any formula of political status that may be selected by them in the future. Thus the Puerto Rican people is

(Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry)

protecting its sovereignty so that it can decide for itself on any change in status.

As regards the nature and political dignity of the alternatives put to the people, the three Puerto Rican parties require that they be decolonization formulas, and that they be recognized as such in advance by the United Nations and by the United States Congress.

Lastly, the aspiration to incorporate guarantees in the Constitution of Puerto Rico regarding cultural identity and American citizenship responds to two basic concerns of the Puerto Rican people: first, that they will not lose their cultural identity and their language, regardless of the political status they choose; and, secondly, that their American citizenship will be protected under any status formula, including independence.

We joyfully welcome this multiparty consensus on areas of such fundamental importance to our country's future.

We also see that all political sectors in Puerto Rico recognize the importance of the United Nations in guaranteeing Puerto Rico's right to choose its own political future in this unequal power play with the United States.

The United Nations also has a vital role to play in clarifying the aspects of decolonization in the alternatives put to the electorate in a plebiscite on political status.

The Special Committee must play a very important part as an observer in any future plebiscite. The multiparty consensus achieved in Puerto Rico should prompt the United States delegation to re-evaluate its traditional position in this forum to the effect that the problem of the political status of Puerto Rico is an internal affair of the United States.

(Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry)

Following the changes in world geopolitics in recent years, this position is no longer tenable. The right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination is a matter that falls within the purview of this forum and the international community.

Clear proof of this is the fact that traditional staunch allies of the United States position, the pro-statehood groups, are appearing before the Committee this year, in recognition of its jurisdiction over the case of Puerto Rico, to ask the United Nations to protect the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination, following the frustrated attempt to have a plebiscite law adopted in Congress. Behind the shield of its argument that the case of Puerto Rico is an internal affair, the United States Department of Justice is telling Congress that Puerto Rico remains an unincorporated Territory under the Territorial Clause of the United States Constitution. However, here in the United Nations the United States is upholding the international legitimacy of the Commonwealth endorsed by resolution 748 (VIII) of 1953. It is time for the United States Government to clarify this inconsistency in its position.

(Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry)

We urge the United States delegation to comply with its bilateral and international commitments, to recognize the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination, to recognize the wish of the people of Puerto Rico that the status it prefers should be expressed through a procedure selected by it, and to recognize the sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico under any status alternative that may be proposed to and selected by it.

Lastly, we support the amendments to the resolution submitted by the Republic of Venezuela, introduced by way of suggestion by Senator Marco Antonio Regalo.

Mr. Vizcarrondo Irizarry withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. Sonia Rivera (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueño) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I now call on Mrs. Rivera.

Mrs. RIVERA (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Sonia Rivera, and I am accompanied here by Onelia Perez. Both of us are members of the Political Committee of the National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN)), a Puerto Rican organization made up of persons of diverse ideologies and political and religious persuasions - communists, nationalists and social democrats - all of whom agree on the urgency of creating the republic of Puerto Rico - a just republic for workers, humane towards all, dignified by the social instruments of socialism.

We should like to begin by expressing our gratitude to the Committee for this opportunity to express once again our opinion on the subject of Puerto Rico. We are cognizant of the joy felt by all good Puerto Ricans at seeing Comrade Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada presiding over the Committee, and we take this opportunity to recognize, through him, the heroic and tireless struggle

(Mrs. Rivera)

of the Cuban people and Government, the backbone of our continent in the sterling example of their ideological commitment to the arduous proletarian task of creating a world free of exploited people and their exploiters.

The item of Puerto Rico has been under discussion now for more than two decades in the United Nations. Sometimes it seems that it has become a ritual in the Special Committee to hear our voices and to report to the General Assembly, which receives and approves the report without any major discussion. However, the Government in Washington, D.C. ignores the Committee's resolutions and wishes, thus demonstrating, as it has repeatedly done with regard to the most flagrant human rights violations, its disdain for those lacking economic and military power in order to impose its policies through brute force.

The lesson has not escaped the Puerto Rican pro-independence advocates that, unfortunately, armed force is one way of asserting the policies of a people. We would thus remind the Committee that the Puerto Rican people, acting through one of its principal vehicles, the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), also reserves the right of nations to use this tool to speed up self-determination and independence, aware that such methods of struggle imply the danger of injury and death among civilian populations.

At the present time, and with very few exceptions, the desire of our people for peace and dialogue has resulted in stress being placed on the negotiations between Puerto Rico and the United States towards achieving a settlement of the colonial question of Puerto Rico. The sole objective of this dialogue is to achieve the decolonization of our homeland; the freeing of our political prisoners and prisoners of war; the return to our sovereign and Puerto Rican society of those who are being persecuted for their political

(Mrs. Rivera)

beliefs, and who have been forced underground or into exile, and the cessation of the judicial harassment and trials of our eight comrades in the case of Hartford, Connecticut, and others. To this end, we ask the Committee to add to the draft resolution a request for the release of our political prisoners and prisoners of war, as proposed by the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño. We, who have worked out a consensus of support for the addition of such a paragraph, protest its exclusion.

At this time there is talk about the celebration of the 500 years that have passed since Europe began the colonization of our American continent. Governments of Europe and the United States are calling this "the meeting of two cultures". We call it 500 years of genocide, slavery, exploitation and misery imposed by Europe on the masses of poor whites, blacks and indigenous peoples on our continent. But however it is viewed, 1992 will be the year in which the eyes of the world will be fixed on developments on our continent.

The United States has a great opportunity, whether through the initiative of its executive, legislative or judicial branches, to do away with this detrimental lack of respect and justice, its aggression and flouting of our continent's republics by declaring its intention to decolonize Puerto Rico and allowing it to exercise its right to be part of the great family of Latin American and Spanish-speaking nations of our continent. It can achieve this in 1992. It would be unjust to ask, argue or insist that the Puerto Rican people have any more patience after that year.

What can this body do, and what can the Latin American countries do, the countries of the non-aligned movement, the countries that desire self-determination for peoples, the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist countries? What can the countries in the United Nations do?

(Mrs. Rivera)

In a world that has already suffered so many affronts to its humanity, its principles of justice and its honesty, its leaders should set an example for us to follow far from the same banal paths, a different example from that of leaders who sell out for money, trading their patrimony for transitory economic advantages, and who fall on their knees before empires, whether out of fear or opportunism.

This we offer the Committee as a way to rectify the case of Puerto Rico, which is a United States insult to members, because it is a permanent reminder that force counts for more than all the talk to which this international body aspires, to make it a tool for peace and progress.

One must remember the past. The North Americans have long told us that we Puerto Ricans do not want independence. However, which of you have had a similar experience, and can tell us that no country wants to be free or that a slave wants to be a slave? The differences between us Puerto Ricans have not concerned freedom, but rather the means of achieving it and what it comprises. That is appropriate for us to debate. It is not appropriate to accept the argument put foward by the empire that is keeping its boot on the neck of the oppressed Puerto Rican people that we do not want to get up off the floor.

We therefore ask this body to take more consistent steps than in the past to ensure the triumph of the dignity of the Puerto Rican people, a dignity that is at the same time that of all human beings on Earth. These steps, which nations can take together, have been previously taken in South Africa and in other countries. They have even, in some cases, been taken incorrectly, but they have been taken.

(Mrs. Rivera)

While we are concerned with the supreme definition, in Albizu's terms, "Yankees or Puerto Ricans", the task of the Committee is to consider what constitutes a tool of freedom or a tool for the repression of the weak by the powerful.

Independence or death. We shall overcome.

Mrs. Rivera withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Juan Manuel Delgado Colón (Comité Anti Plebiscito (CAP) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I call on Mr. Delgado Colón.

Mr. DELGADO COLON (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Juan Manual Delgado Colón. I am a historian. I am acting as spokesman for the Comité Anti Plebiscito, which has come before the Special Committee on two previous occasions.

The Comité Anti Plebiscito was organized in Puerto Rico to contest and denounce the plebiscite that the United States Congress wanted to impose on Puerto Rico. We were the first to make a public appeal on the need to create a united front to reject the plebiscite. The front was created, and all pro-independence organizations in the country rejected the imperialist plebiscite. The workers' movement also rejected it. Moreover, that plebiscite was defeated last year here in the Committee on decolonization, when every patriotic organization rejected it. Even its sole defenders, the leaders of the Partido Independentista (PIP), agreed here, through its representative Fernando Martín, that the planned plebiscite was not in accordance with international law.

Why did the Government of the United States postpone the date for the holding of this plebiscite? It did so because the vast majority of independence-minded Puerto Ricans rejected it. A survey held at the initiative of an influential newspaper in our country showed that more than 65 per cent of the membership of the Partido Independentista rejected the holding of this plebiscite. And no plebiscite is legally valid in Puerto Rico until the United States renounces its political domination over the island. Much less would it have any validity if the liberation movement of Puerto Rico does not accept it.

(Mr. Delgado Colón)

The Comité Anti Plebiscito would like to inform the Committee that the United States is persisting in its intention to hold such a consultation in violation of international law. However, given the overwhelming rejection of its plebiscite bill, and the fact that the bill was seen publicly as being imposed on the Puerto Rican people, the United States decided to change its strategy. The information we have is that the National Security Council of the United States has brought pressure to bear on the leaders of the Puerto Rican parties to hold a referendum on the Constitution of Puerto Rico with a view to making the plebiscite a constitutional issue. In that case, the very Constitution of Puerto Rico would require the holding of a plebiscite as a prerequisite to changing the status or political situation of the island. It would thus appear to the world that the plebiscite is being held at the initiative and by will of the Puerto Ricans, and not of the United States, which is indeed the party imposing it. The new bill proposing a referendum for next November is another United States farce for the purpose of perpetuating its domination over Puerto Rico.

In August 1989 the Comité Anti Plesbiscito reported in this forum that the inappropriately termed "negotiation and consultation" process was controlled and directed by the National Security Council of the United States, which has kept Puerto Rico under its jurisdiction since 1947, and by its political branch, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Our report was corroborated three months later by the leaders of the Partido Nuevo Progresista, which in the first week of 1989, in Washington, reported on the direct intervention of the CIA in the present process. The Comité held a press conference in Puerto Rico on this matter. Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) appeared to examine the report, and the mass media censored all evidence provided by the Comité, which shows that the editorial

(Mr. Delgado Colón)

reorganization of the mass media as a whole in Puerto Rico is intimately tied to the CIA. Today we can state that the intense work carried out by the National Security Council and the CIA since 1977 has resulted in a situation in which the leaders of the political parties are in favour of, and are giving behind-the-scenes support to the neo-colonialist status that the United States wishes to impose on Puerto Rico.

Our Committee therefore reiterates what it has been stating since 1989. We are against the entire political process publicly launched in 1989, because it was imposed by United States centres of power; and we say "publicly" because this process has been carried out through secret negotiations since 1977. We are opposed to this process, because it is being pursued by the leaders of the political parties behind the people's backs, in secret meetings in Washington hotels and offices. We are opposed to it, because the people have not been involved in submitting proposals outlining the so-called political formulas. We are opposed, because it has been an anti-democratic process in which not even the grass roots of the parties were able to express their ideas on the drafting of these formulas. We are opposed, because the press has maintained permanent censorship. The four main nationally circulated newspapers publish statements only of those individuals favouring the process. We are opposed, because the so-called public hearings held by the United States Congress have been carried out in a state of siege, and those who are opposed to the process have not been allowed to speak. We are opposed, because this has not been a free process. We are opposed, because United States intelligence has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on mass manipulation operations, disinformation and political and psychological operations to destroy the independence ideology and anti-imperialist nationalism and to lay the foundation of a new colonial order.

(Mr. Delgado Colón)

In 1989 we discharged our duty of denouncing in advance the plans of United States intelligence agents to create an autonomy-independence front that would support its neo-colonialism, which is one of their objectives. Moreover, we are opposed to this entire process, because there will be no independence, no self-determination in Puerto Rico as long as there are United States bases on the island; as long as there are nuclear bases in Puerto Rico; as long as the FBI and other espionage agencies continue to infiltrate and terrorize the freedom movement. As long as there is United States citizenship in Puerto Rico there will be interventionism, and independence will not come to pass.

I will conclude by stating clearly that none of the fighters who has been beaten, oppressed, tortured, imprisoned and subjected to other ill-treatment has ever negotiated anything with the United States; nor has any assembly of the grass-roots independence movement supported the so-called independence designed in Washington, D.C. Those alleged negotiations have been carried out by a minority of professional politicians bent upon doing the will of the imperialist Power.

We urge the Committee on decolonization to reaffirm our right to self-determination and independence, demand that the United States immediately transfer political power to Puerto Rico, that it immediately free all prisoners of war and pro-independence political prisoners and that it cease and desist from perpetuating neo-colonialism in Puerto Rico. We urge the Committee, regardless of the new status that the United States imposes on Puerto Rico as of 1992, to maintain its jurisdiction over this matter until Puerto Rico can exercise its self-determination and achieve independence.

Mr. Delgado Colón withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. Elsie Valdes Ramos (Puertorriqueños Pro-Estadid, Inc.) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I call on Mrs. Valdes Ramos.

Mrs. VALDES RAMOS (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Elsie Valdés, and I teach history in the Vega Baja high school; with me is Iris Bonilla, who is a member of the organization I represent, Puertorriqueños Pro Estadidad, a non-partisan dedicated to statehood for the island.

At the very outset I want to make it very clear that nothing I may say should be interpreted as a general attack on the people or the Government of the United States of America; as citizens of the United States we appreciate and value our fellow citizens and our governmental institutions. But that will not keep me from referring to certain officials of the colonial Government of the Commonwealth, to certain members of the United States Congress or to certain individuals or businesses as saboteurs of the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination.

A few months ago Puertorriqueños Pro Estadidad adopted, and submitted to this Committee and to the United States Congress, a resolution setting out our position on the decolonization process in Puerto Rico, the item now before the Committee; I have appended a copy of that resolution to the written text of my petition.

On the threshold of the twenty-first century, as we commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, Puerto Rico is the sole remaining colonial Territory in the Americas, the oldest colony in the world. I shall be submitting a written summary of the historical record from 1493 to 1952, which testifies to that fact, as well as evidence of Congressional attempts in 1952 to conceal our colonial status with the creation of the Commonwealth. Despite the history we have shared with the United States for nearly a century, Congress has not yet recognized in practical terms the basic, inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination with respect to defining its political status.

(Mrs. Valdés Ramos)

The failure of Congress and the United States authorities to recognize that right in practice is the Achilles heel of the United States as advocate and defender of modern democracy. A nation that is the world's exemplar and the guardian of mankind must not continue to deny to Puerto Ricans the basic democratic right of self-determination.

Recently, on the initiative of President Bush, Congress spent nearly two years on a process aimed at the recognition in practice of the self-determination of the Puerto Rican people through a plebiscite to have been held in 1991. But the process was aborted, owing to the following factors: the obstructionist machinations of the colonialist leadership of the island; the assistance they received from the multi-million-dollar corporations that operate there while enjoying enormous tax breaks; the racial and cultural prejudices of certain senators; and the conflicting partisan interests of the Democratic and Republican parties. I must note, however, that we enjoyed the support of the House of Representatives, and of individual legislators such as Representative Lazomarsino and Senator J. Bennett Johnston.*

In view of the obstructionism and indifference by some members of Congress with respect to the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination, the island's colonial problem has ceased to be an internal matter.

For those and other reasons, Puerto Rico continues to sway in the wind, experiencing political uncertainty and living under a colonial system.

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* Mr. Slaby (Czechoslovakia), Vice-Chairman, took the chair.

(Mrs. Valdés Ramos)

What exactly are those reasons? I cannot fail to note that the United Nations, too, has contributed to Puerto Rico's continued colonial status. As a result of the adoption of the Commonwealth Constitution in 1952, the United Nations was tricked by United States Government spokesmen into thinking that Puerto Rico had exercised its right to self-determination by ratifying the Constitution, and that the Constitution was a bilateral pact between the United States and Puerto Rico.

The United States requested the United Nations to release it from its obligation to submit annual reports on the colonial case of Puerto Rico under Article 73 (e) of the Charter. It was because of that misrepresentation and deceit that the General Assembly adopted resolution 748 (VIII).

That resolution was in response to a trick, to a concealment of the colonial status of Puerto Rico and to the desire of certain powerful quarters in the United States to wash their hands before the world and deny they held a colony in the Caribbean inhabited by 3.6 million citizens who at the end of the twentieth century have yet to exercise their right to self-determination.

Members know all that, but still keep resolution 748 (VIII) alive. How can that resolution imply that Puerto Rico has ceased to be a colony while the United Nations itself refers the case of Puerto Rico each year to its decolonization Committee? Is the United Nations trying through this Committee to decolonize a colony that, according to a General Assembly resolution, ceased to be a colony in 1952? The people of Puerto Rico cannot understand this.

(Mrs. Valdés Ramos)

The fact is that Puerto Rico is still a colony. The Committee should act properly and begin a true process of decolonization. It should recommend to the General Assembly that it rescind resolution 748 (VIII) so the United States would have to shoulder its responsibility to the international community for keeping Puerto Rico a colony.

For six years we have been asking the United Nations to observe the process. But that does not mean that the United Nations should not exercise its prerogatives where it can and should take action, such as in rescinding resolution 748 (VIII).

If the United States Congress does not join with the Puerto Ricans in a decolonization process through a plebiscite, which should take place by 1994, my organization would support direct United Nations intervention in resolving the political status of the island. But to encourage Congress to join with us in resuming and completing that process, it is important that the United Nations do its part by rescinding resolution 748 (VIII). It is important that those sectors of Congress that do not want a plebiscite understand that there is pressure from the international community.

(Mrs. Valdés Ramos)

The overwhelming majority of the people of Puerto Rico value their United States citizenship and desire permanent union with the United States, but they also call upon Congress quickly to enable them to exercise their right to self-determination in order to decide whether the island will become a state of the Union, an independent republic or a freely associated republic. What is not acceptable is the present colonial formula of Commonwealth status.

That is why any resolution this Committee adopts should recognize the decolonization options already recognized in resolution 1541 (XV): statehood, independence and free association.

May God help us in our task.

Mrs. Valdés Ramos withdrew.

The CHAIRMAN: As I had only just taken the Chair I was unable to interrupt the speaker, whose statement lasted some 11 minutes, but I remind succeeding speakers to observe the seven-minute time limit.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. Gloria Viera (Las Mujeres Estadistas de las Ramas del Programa de Salud) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mrs. Viera.

Mrs. VIERA (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Gloria Viera, a former teacher at the Nursing School of the University of Rio Piedras. With me is Mrs. Nitza Navarro, committeewoman of the Partido Republicano Nacional.

I shall summarize a study carried out by teachers in Puerto Rico on public health and welfare if Puerto Rico should become a state. I want to make it clear that our participation here is a reflection solely of our interest in a prompt decision on the island's political status in order to achieve social development in line with that enjoyed by the 50 states of the

(Mrs. Viera)

United States. We are convinced that a majority of the Puerto Rican people will opt for permanent union with the United States.

Puerto Rico would not be a mendicant or subjugated state. I have with me data confirming the need for a solution to this problem for the benefit of our country. We call for the broadest and fairest extension of the scores of social welfare programmes we have lost because we are not a state and because we have no defined status. As a sovereign state of the United States, Puerto Rico would be entitled to Federal programmes covering a variety of services we cannot now request.

The public health crisis is urgent. There are many problems that cannot be solved under the present Government and the present status. Those problems include a very high incidence of mental health problems for which services have decreased considerably in recent years. This is reflected in domestic violence, suicide, stress, a high murder rate, drug addiction and a resulting increase in cases of AIDS, alcoholism in men and women alike, affecting maternal and child health, and a high incidence of teenage pregnancies.

The crisis is affected also by the high cost of services and the lack of nursing professionals. While the island produces the required number of nurses, we cannot keep these professionals in Puerto Rico.

If the status of Puerto Rico is resolved, we will be able to allocate our resources more effectively, and to dedicate more money to vital public services. If the status question is resolved, the Government will not have to spend so much money on election-campaign advertising, and will be able to put it to better use in public health.

I have annexed to the written text of my statement statistics on public health services.

(Mrs. Viera)

We believe that only when the political future of Puerto Rico is resolved will we be able to resolve the critical health situation of our people.

Mrs. Viera withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Luis Gutiérrez (City Council, City of Chicago) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I now call on Mr. Gutiérrez.

Mr. GUTIERREZ (interpretation from Spanish): I am here as President Pro Tempore of the City Council of the City of Chicago. I represent the 26th Ward, which has a large majority of Puerto Rican residents, who are among the 2.5 million forced into exile by United States colonialism in Puerto Rico.

I am very grateful for this opportunity to address this Committee on the question of Puerto Rico. I know the Committee has heard and will hear much testimony on the painful colonial situation of my homeland, Puerto Rico, and I know it is expert on the subject. I want therefore to focus on three specific points of great importance to Puerto Ricans who live in the United States.

First, Puerto Rico is a colony and must be decolonized. Most representatives here have participated in the work of putting an end to the horrendous crime of colonialism. It was the work of millions of men and women using different means - people ranging from the unforgettable Gandhi to the illustrious Mandela - who persuaded the international community, despite the vehement opposition of the United States, to declare the 1990s the Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. I am here to request the Committee's solidarity, to give force to that mandate. If this decade is indeed to see the eradication of colonialism, Puerto Ricans must be enabled to exercise their inalienable right of self-determination.

(Mr. Gutiérrez)

Because there must be no impediment to that process, I submitted a resolution to the Chicago City Council, which was adopted unanimously and signed by the Mayor. We submitted it to this Committee last year along with an appeal to the decolonization Committee to ensure the complete unhampered exercise by the people of Puerto Rico of their right to self-determination.

Everyone knows that Puerto Rico is a colony. Senator Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois knows it; the General Accounting Office said so in its most recent report on Puerto Rico; even Patrick Buchanan, who represents the most conservative quarters in the United States, has recognized the status of Puerto Rico. Mr. Buchanan went even further by stating that Puerto Rico has the right to declare itself a free and sovereign nation, which was recognized also by the Heads of State and Government meeting last month at Guadalajara, Mexico.

(Mr. Gutiérrez)

The problem of nationalities remains to be resolved the world over. Many say history is repeating itself. I agree with the great Puerto Rican political thinker Juan Antonio Corretjer, who says that history does not repeat itself, but rather affirms itself. And as historical problems demand resolution, the problems of nationalities and colonialism must be resolved once and for all. Puerto Rico is an example of this, and its colonial situation must be resolved.

Secondly, I am here to ask that any process of decolonization in Puerto Rico must include direct participation by Puerto Ricans in the diaspora. Puerto Rican emigration to the United States is a direct result of colonialism, and it is only with the full exercise of the right to self-determination that Puerto Ricans in exile will begin to take their part in history by determining their own future as a political entity.

A truly democratic process of decolonization must guarantee the participation of all the Puerto Ricans concerned; in the case of Puerto Rico, this must include the 40 per cent of the nation that is in exile.

Finally, I urge this Committee, which represents the loftiest aspirations of mankind, to include in this year's resolution a demand that the United States - as a gesture of good faith, in the spirit of the great changes mankind is undergoing today and in line with the noblest precepts of its democracy - declare unconditional and immediate amnesty for the 18 Puerto Rican men and women in prison for political activity in favour of independence and against colonialism.

Mr. Gutiérrez withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Celina Romany (Association of American Jurists) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Ms. Romany.

Ms. ROMANY (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Celina Romany and I am the permanent representative of the Association of American Jurists to the Economic and Social Council. With me today is Mr. José Morín, who serves as alternate representative.

The Association of American Jurists (AAJ) is an non-governmental organization with consultative status in the Economic and Social Council. Its membership comprises judges and attorneys from throughout the American continent, organized into national chapters. One of its essential goals is to defend human rights in the hemisphere. On the basis of the broadest possible definition of human rights, we seek also to make a contribution as jurists to international organizations on issues concerning the right of peoples to self-determination and economic and political independence, including their sovereignty over their natural resources, environmental protection, racial discrimination and so forth. On this occasion we want to address the struggle of the Puerto Rican people for self-determination.

We have submitted a written paper to the Committee, and my statement will do no more than summarize that paper. I shall not detail the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, as previous speakers have addressed this issue eloquently. I shall reaffirm the colonial status of Puerto Rico, as well as the dubious legal status of the plebiscite process carried out by the United States, which is the sole channel for decolonization.

I shall focus today on the international legal aspects of the right of peoples to self-determination and shall show how the right to self-determination of Puerto Ricans residing in the United States would be

(Ms. Romany)

virtually disregarded in a sham process of decolonization - the plebiscite - orchestrated by the colonial Power. I shall speak of a people twice forgotten.

Under international law Puerto Ricans living in the United States are an integral part of the Puerto Rican people. The description of Puerto Ricans as an ethnic minority in the United States is incorrect in terms of international law. A "nation" is defined as a people, or aggregate of men and women, which exists in the form of an organized juridical society inhabiting a distinct portion of the Earth. Those individuals usually speak the same language, live by the same customs and possess historical continuity. They share certain racial and ethnic characteristics and - generally though not necessarily - a sovereign Government. The United Nations has used the term "people" in the context of the right to self-determination.

The elements which identify a people entitled to self-determination have been summarized by the Special Committee against Apartheid. The use of the term implies a relationship with a territory, even if the people in question has been wrongfully expelled from it and artificially replaced by another population. This question has a subjective and an objective component. Subjectively, it asks whether the members of a group think of themselves as a distinct group; objectively, it asks whether the group has such common determinate characteristics as ethnicity, language, history or religion.

At the time of the United States invasion, Puerto Rico had a high sense of national identity. Racially, culturally and ethnically, Puerto Ricans constituted a people. In the nineteenth century a political entity already existed under the Autonomous Charter in which Spain granted Puerto Rico the right to representation before the Spanish courts, the right to ratify or

(Ms. Romany)

reject commercial treaties and the right to levy tariffs on imports and exports. By the end of the nineteenth century, Puerto Rico had developed a distinct and significant artistic tradition.

The struggle for the survival of the identity of the Puerto Rican people, as pointed out yesterday by the representative of Venezuela, is unique in Latin America. This social, economic and cultural identity has been obstructed by the colonial Power, but it was recently affirmed in Puerto Rico through a law declaring Spanish the official language: a law that affirmed the national personality of the Puerto Rican people. The current Governor signed it, declaring that culture and biology take precedence over legislation. It refers too to Puerto Ricans residing in the United States.

In the decade in which the United States maintains before the international community that Puerto Ricans achieved the status of a self-governing people, we are witnessing one of the greatest waves of emigration from Puerto Rico to the United States; it is a result of the political and economic programmes that are industrializing the colony.

(Ms. Romany)

The Committee should take note of the fact that almost half of the Puerto Rican people reside in the United States and that these people cannot be relegated to the backdrop when the decolonization of Puerto Rico is at issue. They have the right to participate in the decolonization movement, which takes pride in its broad democratic base in keeping with the trend towards democracy throughout the world at the end of this century.

The history of the migration and the conditions in which the Puerto Rican people live in the United States are documented in the text of our statement. Let us stress that the mass migration of Puerto Ricans is a cornerstone of the colonial development of the island.

Despite the passage of time, Puerto Ricans in the United States continue to display their clear cultural identity, and we wish to emphasize that it is clearly because of their characteristics, their race, ethnicity and language, and because they defend their culture that they are discriminated against every day in every sphere and are condemned to live on the horrific sidelines of United States society, as do all those who are different.

In the 1960s and 1970s we witnessed the return to their Territory of a large number of Puerto Ricans residing in the United States. They did so on the air-bus, which the Puerto Rican writer Luis Rafael Sánchez described in the metaphor of the air-bridge that transports the constant flow of Puerto Ricans between the United States and Puerto Rico.

In recent decades a heterogeneous group has been returning to Puerto Rico. We find among them Puerto Ricans who have been living in the United States for many years - some of them for more than 10 or 15 years; we find the children of Puerto Ricans who were born and raised in the United States and migrant farm workers. The most recent wave of migration, apart from this

(Ms. Romany)

continuous flow to and from the United States, is composed of professionals who are escaping the colony's structural decadence.

Puerto Ricans in the United States are different from other groups of immigrants, as they maintain their culture, language and traditions intact. By way of example, and as evidence of this constant link between Puerto Rico and the United States, I might mention the constant communication between Puerto Ricans on the mainland and political parties on the island; the creation of a Department for Puerto Rican Affairs, which is part of the executive branch of the Puerto Rican Government; and the constant campaigns of Puerto Rican political parties in the United States.

Similarly, organizations such as the National Congress for the Rights of Puerto Ricans have maintained organizational links on the island. Such groups as the Puerto Rican Fund for Legal Defense and Education, among others, also have a history of struggle within the United States to preserve the identity of the Puerto Rican people. This can be seen in their many legal battles against those laws that seek to have English maintained as the sole official language. The struggle for bilingualism in the United States is being waged in many social sectors.

The CHAIRMAN: You have been speaking for 10 minutes. Please conclude your statement now.

Ms. ROMANY (interpretation from Spanish): As members of the Committee are aware, the right to self-determination is a law under jus cogens. Basic human rights are recognized under international law, which cannot be abrogated by any nation. As jurists concerned about the observance of international law, and as part of an organization advocating compliance with it, we urge the Committee to ensure that applicable international law is indeed implemented.

(Ms. Romany)

The Committee has been provided with ample evidence of the need to reactivate General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV), which lays down the prima facia obligation to transmit information in respect of a Territory that is geographically separate and is distinct ethnically and culturally. This requirement must also include periodic reports on the status of Puerto Ricans within the United States.

Specifically, we suggest that the Committee draft a proposal to the General Assembly for the establishment of a committee of experts that would document the illegality of the status of Puerto Rico, and establish those conditions that can satisfy the minimum requirements of international law, including the participation of the Puerto Rican people residing in the United States.

We reiterate our demand that Puerto Rican political prisoners be released and our statements on human rights violations, recorded in the conclusions of the Special Tribunal held in New York.

Ms. Romany withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Miguel Angel Cardona (Fajardeños Pro-estadidad) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I now call on Mr. Cardona.

Mr. CARDONA (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Miguel Angel Cardona, and I represent Fajardeños Pro-estadidad together with Mrs. Nora Benabe who is with me today.

The political relationship of Puerto Rico with the United States depends unilaterally on the Congress of the United States under the current system of law.

Although the current administration of the Puerto Rican Government has upheld the concept of shared or limited sovereignty, only a declaration by

(Mr. Cardona)

Congress can establish that sovereignty, as developments that were expected to result in the founding of the Commonwealth have not occurred. The Congress is legislating for Puerto Rico as it did prior to 1952. The Supreme Court of the United States is making rulings on Puerto Rico as it did before 1952, and the President sends our residents to war but does not allow them to vote for him, as was the case before 1952. Puerto Rico is merely entitled to request to be heard, but there is no guarantee whatsoever that what Puerto Ricans request will be granted.

This is the striking reality that brings me here. What we hoped would happen as from 1952 - the de facto and gradual recognition of our equality as citizens, as individuals, and as a jurisdiction, by the Government of the United States - has not occurred. If at some time the Federal Government, the States Members of the United Nations and the voters in Puerto Rico believed that we had ceased or would cease, to be a colony under Law No. 600 and under other federal laws and the Constitution of 1952, they believed so in good faith, but erroneously. With the collapse of the iron curtain, the ideological curtain shutting off Puerto Rico has also fallen, and it can now rejoin the world.

Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan and Bush have openly stated that they were in favour of the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination. However, this has not been the case with Congress, which on every occasion has denied this right. Similarly, the United States courts are not interested in the subject, considering Puerto Ricans to be inconsequential in national management, and thus not entitled to the rights granted to other citizens and residents of the nation.

As a result of the political organization and economic structure that we have, the development of Puerto Rico is very anomalous. In spite of

(Mr. Cardona)

achievements in investments, production and economic structure and infrastructure, today Puerto Ricans own a lower percentage of their national resources than they did 50 years ago. Other problems that have yet to be solved include unemployment, and our dependence on foreign resources, which has in fact increased. Every year United States welfare payments increase, just as foreign financing is growing, resulting in a heavier burden of debt-servicing and decreased capital yield.

Puerto Rico is moving towards an economy characterized by high technology, together with research-based industries. However, it also serves as a mechanism for the transfer of subsidies from the Federal Government to transnational corporations, as the growth of Puerto Rico in the past 20 years, and particularly since the organization of companies under the Internal Revenue Code of the United States, has been closely linked to federal investments and the transfer of funds to the island. Puerto Rico has been transformed into Puerto Rico, Incorporated, an enormous operation that gives subsidies to large corporations that export, with the help of a Government dependent upon the United States that has been an accomplice to this situation.

(Mr. Cardona)

As is to be expected, investments in infrastructure in Puerto Rico have been geared towards serving transnational corporations and external capital, while the type of investments that could provide balanced regional development - in services, particularly tourism, and in agriculture - have been disregarded.

This pattern has been particularly clear since 1900, and particularly tragic. In 1988, the Puerto Rican debt was $9.5 billion, but investments necessary for the economy, in order to improve the infrastructure, amounted to $10.65 billion, in accordance with reports from relevant agencies.

The problem of providing drinking water and processing solid, medical and toxic waste seem to be impossible to resolve. To a great extent, they are due to the fact that Puerto Rico has become an operational centre for many polluting United States industries, which would not have been permitted to operate in the states of the Union. The transfer of federal funds to the corporations, through Puerto Rico and its residents, is being carried out at a cost that is impossible to assess in terms of the health and well-being of the inhabitants of Puerto Rico.

What are some of the other essential characteristics of this political system? Over $6 billion in federal, personal and government transfers; a 16 per cent unemployment rate; a 46 per cent participation in the labour force; a 40 per cent school drop-out rate; a constant migration to the United States; statutory United States citizenship; a negative capitalization rate for our corporations; a very low rate of personal saving; a liberal credit policy for personal expenditure; a very large informal economy; consumerism linked to the informal economy; epidemic and endemic emotional problems; poor educational results; widespread loss of the use of common languages and many other problems.

(Mr. Cardona)

All of this leads to a Government that is unmanageable in size. In 1950 10 per cent of Puerto Ricans worked for the Government. In 1991 government workers comprised 28 per cent of the labour force, as the development structure cannot provide jobs for Puerto Ricans. This is the case in spite of the fact that 40 per cent of Puerto Ricans live in the United States because they are not able to find appropriate living conditions in their own country.

The economic infrastructure has been dangerously on the decline and the possibility of an economic infrastructure geared towards services such as tourism is not being considered. Some fear lest Puerto Ricans are "contaminated" by libertarian ideas, thus having an "adverse" effect on their sense of dependence fostered by the Government and large corporations.

Essential services are of extremely poor quality. The crisis in that field is the norm in Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans have been taught that disaster is right around the corner, particularly if there is any change in the relationship with the United States. The Federal Government has lent itself to this game by being indifferent to the use of federal funds for such services as health and education. The same criteria are not applied to these services for Puerto Ricans that are applied for other United States citizens.

The tourist industry has not reflected changes in the tropics. The development of tourist zones outside the capital has not been encouraged, except by large corporations and for projects that are largely closed to Puerto Ricans of medium income. Multinational projects are favoured.

The manufacturing industry is isolationist. No importance is attached to Europe as an appropriate market. The idea of economic development in Puerto Rico is based on the import of capital and technology without the development of Puerto Rican technology for export to United States markets. It is essential today that we develop markets outside the United States, but since

(Mr. Cardona)

transnationals control the Government, directly or indirectly, through the United States Congress, those companies are subsidized and our national corporations are not strengthened.

The development strategy followed in Puerto Rico has not been economically oriented. It involves replacing personal and government income with income from the Federal Government. Although there is a significant reduction -

The CHAIRMAN: I am sorry to interrupt you, but you have exceeded your time-limit by three minutes. Please summarize your statement and read it to its conclusion.

Mr. CARDONA (interpretation from Spanish): As long as the institutional relationship with the United States and the Constitution of Puerto Rico are unconditionally subject to Congress, and as long as our personal relationship, that of citizens, is also subject to Congress, the Committee should recognize that the change expected in Puerto Rico as of 1952 cannot occur, and that the General Assembly resolution through which Puerto Rico was removed from the list of colonies has been rendered invalid directly by the Congress of the United States and inaction on the part of the United States courts.

Mr Cardona withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Josefina Rodríguez (National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Ms. Rodríguez.

Ms. RODRIGUEZ (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Josefina Rodríguez. I am a member of the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners, and am representing my

(Ms. Rodríguez)

colleague, Jaime Delgado, who, before being arrested and incarcerated by the United States Government, was the national coordinator of the Committee.

Our colleague is not with us because today, after serving four years in prison, he is now on conditional release, but was only given one day in which to make the round-trip from Chicago to New York. This situation not only constitutes an emotional problem for our colleague, but also a financial one, because a round-trip ticket from Chicago to New York would cost our Committee around $600.

This is why I am presenting his statement, and the reason why the Committee will be hearing it in English is because our colleague is one of our young Puerto Ricans who, for reasons beyond his control, was born and raised in the United States, and English is the language he knows best.

(M. Rodríguez)

(spoke in English)

"I should like to begin my presentation by first paying a tribute to 'El Maestro' Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, one of Puerto Rico's greatest leaders, whose 100th birthday we will celebrate this coming 12 September. Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos' own life was cut short by the brutal treatment he suffered while in United States prisons. His example and teachings have motivated thousands of Puerto Ricans who today continue the struggle for Puerto Rico's independence. To say that Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos is the symbol of our national consciousness would be an understatement. His contributions and the impact he has had on many of us give truth to the saying 'You can kill the revolutionary, but you cannot kill the revolution'.

"The National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners is an organization whose primary function is to work for the release of Puerto Rican prisoners of war and political prisoners held in United States prisons. I give this presentation as a spokesperson of the committee and as a former political prisoner.

"During previous hearings the Committee has been presented with documented evidence of the United States campaign of repression against the Puerto Rican independence movement dating from 1898 to the present. Our communities, both in Puerto Rico and the United States, are kept under constant surveillance through a network of FBI informants and electronic espionage. Ths recent revelation that the Government in Puerto Rico has kept surveillance files on literally tens of thousands of people from all walks of life is just another example. The fact that people continue to be arrested and go to prison, is yet another.

(Ms. Rodríguez)

"For the past 10 years, our committee has made presentations before this body to expose how the United States Government, to keep control of its colony, is incarcerating Puerto Rican freedom fighters and political activists. There are currently 18 men and women incarcerated in prisons throughout the United States for struggling for Puerto Rico's independence.

"The name, personal profile and location of each prisoner has been given to the Committee, so that there would be no doubt as to the actual existence of these prisoners. Detailed descriptions of their treatment and the conditions under which they are held have also been provided. We have invited members to visit the prisoners and see for themselves. Puerto Rican prisoners of war and political prisoners have always received distinct and singularly different treatment than other prisoners. Their status as political prisoners has been repeatedly acknowledged by the manner in which they are treated by the 'Justice Department' and the Bureau of Prisons.

"All of the prisoners are serving sentences which are excessive by any standard. Using the terminology and criteria of the so-called United States Justice Department, all of the prisoners of war and political prisoners are first-time 'offenders'. Yet, one would never guess by looking at the length of their sentences: Luis Rosa, 105 years; Ricardo Jiménez, 98 years; Elizam Escobar, 68 years; Carmen Valentín, 98 years; Carlos Alberto Torres, 78 years; Dylcia Pagán, 63 years; Adolfo Matos, 78 years; Alicia Rodríguez, 85 years; Ida Luz Rodríguez, 83 years; Oscar López Rivera, 70 years; Alejandrina Torres, 35 years; Alberto Rodríguez, 35 years; Edwin Cortés, 35 years; and Haydeé Beltran, life sentence.

(Ms. Rodríguez)

"Anyone can see that these sentences are more than punishment for alleged 'crimes'. Most of the prisoners have already been incarcerated for 10 years and others have completed eight years. The 'Justice Department's' own statistics show the longest average time served by any federal prisoner for any 'major offence' is six years.

"To expose the injustices being perpetrated against our prisoners, the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War has organized literally hundreds of demonstrations, forums and other activities in the United States, Puerto Rico and other parts of the world. From 7-10 December 1990 the committee, as part of a wide coalition of over 88 organizations from the civic, religious, anti-imperialist, labour and national liberation sectors, organized the Special International Tribunal on the Human Rights Violations of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States.

"The Tribunal, which was held in New York and was comprised of jurists and international figures from Ghana, Britain, Germany, Australia, Puerto Rico and the United States, found that the United States did not follow the same principles it demands from other nations; that its denial of the existence of prisoners of war and political prisoners in its own jails and its subsequent deprivation of the protection offered by international law constitutes an outright violation of the prisoners' human rights.

"As anti-colonial freedom fighters captured in the course of their struggle for national liberation, the Tribunal ruled that Puerto Rican prisoners of war should be treated according to article I, paragraph 4, of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention of 1949.

(Ms. Rodríguez)

"More than enough Governments, international organizations and conferences have recognized the political status of our prisoners so as to remove any doubt that their incarceration is a direct result of the anti-colonial struggle of the Puerto Rican people. Therefore, we ask, consistent with the aspirations of the Puerto Rican people and world opinion, that this Committee include in its final resolution a call for the release of all Puerto Rican prisoners of war and political prisoners and an end to all persecution against Puerto Rican independentistas."

Ms. Rodíguez withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Hipolito Robles Suárez (Grupo Ex-Empleados Públicos en Pro del Plebiscito) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I now call on Mr. Robles Suárez.

Mr. ROBLES SUAREZ (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Hipolito Robles Suárez, a Puerto Rican veteran of the Korean War, ex-member of the Legislature of Puerto Rico and ex-mayor of Fajardo. I am appearing here today as spokesman for the Group of Ex-Public Employees in Favour of the Plebiscite. I am accompanied by Mr. Valeriano Pimentel, the Group's Chairman.

The current political status of Puerto Rico is one of political inequality. This political inequality is reflected in the fact that we Puerto Ricans cannot participate in the electoral processes of the United States. Our participation in the distribution of federal funds is limited; our representative in the Federal Congress does not have the right to vote; we cannot vote for the office of President, or Vice-President, of the nation; and we cannot participate in the taking of federal decisions.

(Mr. Robles Suárez)

We are moved to seek federal statehood because we love the ideals and principles of the United States Government. Puerto Rico has honourably defended the United States in all the wars in which it has participated and has contributed its own as soldiers to the armed forces of the United States, and many of us have given our lives.

If Puerto Rico became a state of the federal union, it would bring to the union the payment of federal contributions which would give Puerto Rico a greater feeling of political dignity. Puerto Rico can contribute to the nation with its extensive Spanish, African and Taino heritage. Statehood does not mean that we would have to give up our traditions, language or customs. Federal statehood would provide the nation with a group of people born in Puerto Rico and with a culture, tradition and Hispanic language that would help to improve relations with Hispanic America. Puerto Rico has all the prerequisites to make it eligible for statehood in the United States. We have adopted many of the principles, traditions and institutions of the democratic Government of the United States and made them our own.

We have more than 3,500,000 inhabitants and the economic resources to maintain a state government and to contribute our share to the cost of the federal government. Ninety-four per cent of the people of Puerto Rico enthusiastically support the principles of democracy on which the Government of the United States is based.

A process of negotiation and consultation between Puerto Rico and the United States Congress was recently concluded. That process lasted 30 months, but we did not achieve the holding of a plebiscite on status. I have come to this body to ask it to intercede with its good offices so that the Congress of the United States agree, first, to promote a process for the people of Puerto

(Mr. Robles Suárez)

Rico to exercise its right to self-determination to resolve the problem of colonial status as quickly as possible and, secondly, to agree that any formula for status which goes before a plebiscite in Puerto Rico will be exempt from the plenary powers of the United States Congress under the territorial clause so that the principle of sovereignty will be included in any of the formulas.

We in Puerto Rico are doing our part, and I hope that the United Nations will not disappoint us.

Mr. Robles Suárez withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Steve Clark (Socialist Workers Party) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I now call on Mr. Clark.

Mr. CLARK: I would like to thank the members of the Special Committee for giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party. The testimony that has been presented here today and yesterday has once more documented that Puerto Rico is indeed a United States colony. The evidence so richly presented here underscores once again the urgency of wiping human history clean of this disgraceful blot. The struggle for Puerto Rico's integrity as a Latin American nation deserves the active support not only of the other peoples of Latin America but also of all the Americas, including the United States. To support the self-determination and independence of Puerto Rico is to strengthen the hand of all those fighting for a world in which all nations are able to chart their own destinies free of imperialist coercion.

To grasp the full burden of 500 years of colonial domination is to understand why the fight to free Puerto Rico from this yoke must be of the utmost concern for working people and all fighters for social justice in the

(Mr. Clark)

United States. Colonial rule means the Puerto Rican people are subject to glaring inequality and abuse. They are subject to United States courts, cops, and military authorities. Protection under the Bill of Rights is not among the paltry rights offered by citizenship. Puerto Ricans were made citizens of the United States in 1917 so that thousands of men from the island could be drafted to fight and die for the few dozen ruling families of the United States in the first imperialist world war. Ever since, Puerto Ricans have served as cannon fodder for their colonial masters - in the Second World War, Korea, Viet Nam, and most recently in Iraq. Some 15,000 Puerto Ricans were involved in Operation Desert Storm. By using troops from this colony in the Caribbean, the United States Government underscored the hypocrisy of its claim that it was fighting to defend self-determination and the sovereignty of countries in the Middle East.

The Pentagon occupies 13 per cent of Puerto Rico's most arable land with army and naval bases. From those outposts Washington has staged military attacks on Puerto Rico's neighbours, including Cuba, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Grenada and Panama.

The United States Government has systematically attempted to displace Spanish as the language of the island's inhabitants by making English mandatory. The Official Languages Act of 1902, adopted by the United States dominated legislature, made both English and Spanish official languages. English remained the exclusive language of the public schools in Puerto Rico until 1948, when Spanish was again established as the language of instruction. This imperial policy, however, has met fierce resistance from a people who refuse to be told which language they must speak. Just four months ago the Puerto Rican legislature revoked the 1902 law and established Spanish as the sole official language. Even with this conquest, however, Puerto

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Ricans still confront the insult that the procedures in the United States federal courts in Puerto Rico are still conducted in English.

The fight in Puerto Rico against colonial oppression today is intertwined with a struggle against the economic and social conditions that the big majority of people face there.

Over the past 45 years, the economy has gone from being predominantly agricultural to heavily industrial. A majority of producers in Puerto Rico today are wage workers. Puerto Rico is one of the most industrialized countries in the Caribbean. This working population faces the same problems as workers in other countries: deteriorating wages, high unemployment, speed-up and safety hazards on the job, industrial pollution, assaults on the unions, and cop and goon violence against strikes.

The inequalities resulting from colonial subjugation and imperialist exploitation have made these conditions substantially worse in Puerto Rico. For example, unemployment is far higher and the per capita income on the island is half what it is in even the poorest states in the United States of America. The struggle by the working class for social advances against the employers and the Government goes hand in hand with the fight against colonial oppression, especially as the world capitalist economic crisis deepens and the bosses' drive to squeeze even more out of Puerto Rico's workers and to crush their unions.

A similar assault by the employers is under way in the United States. And as working people attempt to resist these attacks, the colonial oppression of Puerto Rico reinforces all efforts to keep the working class in the United States divided and to keep its most oppressed layers non-union. The colonial status is used to bolster prejudice and national chauvenism, which is the United States employers' main weapon to keep workers in the United States from

(Mr. Clark)

seeing working people in Puerto Rico and Latin America as part of the same struggle against a common enemy. It nurtures racism and discrimination against Puerto Ricans who move to the United States in search of work. If the labour movement in the United States does not unconditionally oppose the subjugation of another people, then political consciousness and elementary human solidarity will be sapped and the fighting strength of the unions will be further drained.

One example is the long history of repression against working-class activists and independence fighters in Puerto Rico. United States police agencies, such as the FBI, have played a notorious role. Recently expanded powers given to local cops and courts are being used to spy upon and imprison militants. The United States Government employs federal grand juries as secret inquisitorial bodies to imprison independence fighters. All Puerto Rican political prisoners should be immediately freed.

(Mr. Clark)

A few weeks ago, 23 heads of state from 19 Latin American countries, plus Spain and Portugal, met in Mexico in the first Ibero-American summit. In his message to the summit conference, Cuban President Fidel Castro noted that "as long as a representative of independent Puerto Rico is not seated amongst us, the Ibero-American family will not be complete". Cuba has been the most consistent and uncompromising international voice in support of Puerto Rico's independence. United States imperialism's neo-colonial domination of Cuba ended in 1959 and since then the Cuban people have shown what can be accomplished when national sovereignty is truly conquered. One reason for United States imperialism's unremitting efforts to destroy the Cuban revolution is the fear of that revolution's example for the people of Puerto Rico.

As members of this Committee know well, the White House and the bipartisan United States Congress have consistently opposed the efforts of international organizations to place their moral weight behind the fight for Puerto Rico's independence.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the worldwide anti-colonial revolt and the independence struggle in Puerto Rico led the United Nations to declare Puerto Rico a Non-Self-Governing Territory. In response, Washington created the "commonwealth" status in 1952. The following year the State Department got the United Nations to reverse its position. The commonwealth status has been used by the United States Government to obscure Puerto Rico's continuing colonial oppression, which has been clearly shown by the testimony here. The resurgence of the independence movement in the 1960's was proof that colonial rule remains. Since 1976 this question has been on this

(Mr. Clark)

Committee's agenda every year, and you have affirmed the inalienable right of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence.

The great majority of people living under colonial rule earlier in this century have broken from their masters and established scores of independent countries, in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Oceania and the Americas. Puerto Ricans, however, remain under colonial rule, along with several millions of others, in Hong Kong, New Caledonia, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guam, Curacao and elsewhere.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the United Nations have proclaimed the 1990s the decade of total elimination of colonialism. Recognition by this Committee of ongoing colonial rule over Puerto Rico will encourage fighters for that country's independence. The perpetuation of 500 years of colonial domination and the denial of its independence is contrary to the interests of the people of Puerto Rico, the interests of the people of the United States, and the interests of all the world's people.

Mr. Clark withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Rev. Annie González (Northlake United Methodist Church) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I now call on the Rev. González.

Rev. GONZALEZ: I am the Reverend Annie González. I come to you today as a community activist and educator in the Humboldt Park/West Town area, a predominantly Puerto Rican district of Chicago, Illinois. I also come to you as an ordained elder of the United Methodist Church of the Northern Illinois Conference.

We are close to entering 1992, a year when part of the world will celebrate Columbus's discovery of America and another part will remember the

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invasion by Columbus - the invasion of our land, the invasion that killed our people, the invasion that enslaved our people, the invasion that abolished our religion and the invasion that treated us as non-humans. We cannot celebrate the arrival of Columbus because it is for us what started the colonization of our people.

This colonization still exists today. Our country, Puerto Rico, has suffered 498 years under colonization. Although this decolonization Committee of the United Nations has recognized since 1972 that Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States and has declared the 1990s the decade to end colonialism, Puerto Rico still remains as a colony. Eighteen of our people, men and women, whose only crime has been to advocate the cause of Puerto Rico's independence, have been tried unjustly, sentenced, jailed and denied the basic human rights afforded to common prisoners. Thirteen of the Puerto Ricans have invoked the international law status of prisoner of war, taking refuge in the Geneva Convention of 1949 and the resulting protocols adopted by the United Nations.

As a member of the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church, I presented a resolution on the decolonization of Puerto Rico at the gathering at our annual conference, 4 through 8 June 1991. It was approved and passed. The United Methodist Church of Northern Illinois supports the movement to decolonize Puerto Rico and the immediate and unconditional release of our prisoners.

As Christians, we believe the colonial situation of Puerto Rico is illegal, dehumanizing and immoral. Our Holy Scriptures help us to understand this. It is clear in the Scriptures that God is a God of liberation and a God of justice and that God is on the side of the oppressed and the colonized. In the Old Testament we see very clearly that God was active and instrumental in

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the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and an unjust ruler and an unjust government. The New Testament is clear about what Jesus teaches about oppression - it must be stopped.

As an ordained clergy, I believe that our task is to speak out against injustice and proclaim liberation for the captives. I believe that we can no longer stand by and allow injustice to occur. We must be involved in the struggle for justice. The time is now to declare in the words of Moses, "Let our people go". Our people must be given a chance to make decisions for themselves. We have suffered too long under colonialism. Let our people go. We must, if we understand the Scriptures correctly, understand that the situation in Puerto Rico is unjust and immoral. The time is now to end the oppression. The time is now to let our people go. This Committee has the moral responsibility to ensure that our prisoners have their basic human rights. However, this Committee also has the responsibility to declare that our prisoners must go free. We emplore you, as members of this Committee, to hear our case and declare to the United States that Puerto Rico must go free.

I wish to inform this Committee that today, at this moment in Puerto Rico, people are being arrested for exercising the right to demonstrate before a consultate of this country which has consistently voted against the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence.

In light of world events, the fact that Puerto Rico is still a colony is absurd and unjust. This Committee has the ability to hear our cry and make our case known. I also wish to inform this Committee that the organization which I represent opposes the exclusion of the freeing of Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war from the final draft resolution

(Rev. González)

as presented by Venezuela. Our people must go free. We look forward to a 1992 free of oppression, with no more colonies and the liberation of our prisoners and our people. Our people must go free.

The Rev. González withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Billy Ocasio (The Conference on the Puerto Rican Colonial Reality) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Ocasio.

Mr. OCASIO: I come before you today as a representative of The Conference on the Puerto Rican Colonial Reality. I come here quoting nobody and with no statistics, for you know the numbers and you know our great teachers and leaders. I come to you as a Puerto Rican-American, or does such a term exist? It is a term which the United States would like us to believe in and some of the people who spoke today and yesterday would like to believe in. My definition of a Puerto Rican-American is what I call a Puerto Rican who grew up in the States, with a consciousness of what an American is, but no idea of what a Puerto Rican is. I have found that this is a direct result of the colonial status that the United States has placed on Puerto Rico, and because of this I have been cheated of who I am. The Puerto Rican culture has been Americanized to a point where we can be called Puerto Rican-Americans by others. As a result, our history and our culture are not being passed on and in Puerto Rico a child is taught not Puerto Rican history, but American history and the American way of living; and if this child is so lucky as to go on to college, maybe then he or she may learn our history and our culture.

When we were taken as a United States possession, we were made United States citizens under the words "democracy" and "liberty and justice for all". But is it fair that we as a people cannot determine our own destiny? In a land where democracy is preached every minute of the day, is it fair that this democracy is preached to all, but not put into practice for all? Is it fair that we are the fastest-growing minority - and United States citizens at that - but yet on the educational ladder we do not exist. This is not by chance, but because the resources that shape America are not extended to its possessions.

(Mr. Ocasio)

It is by your definition that I call Puerto Rico a colony. I join you in your resolution when you call this decade the Decade to end colonialism, and it was the United Nations that put Puerto Rico on the list of colonized countries. It is at this point that I would like to thank you for inviting me here to speak, for I come here only to serve as a reminder that the end of the decade is upon us and this situation must be resolved. All we are asking for is the right as a people, whether we are on the island or here in the States, to be recognized as Puertorriqueños, a people with a country, and that this decision should be one that we make: Puerto Rican-Americans or Puertorriqueños? The United Nations, must provide the way for this question to be asked, but the decision has to be ours and not one made by those who hold the lease on our country.

In closing, I call to your attention three issues that must be discussed and resolved: first, the decolonization of Puerto Rico; secondly, that the Puerto Ricans in the United States and in Puerto Rico be able to determine their own destiny; and, thirdly, I ask that this Committee take note of the fact that the organization I represent opposes the exclusion of the freeing of the Puerto Rican prisoners and prisoners of war from the final draft resolution presented by Venezuela. Yes, I believe in independence. And I leave you as a Puerto Rican, Puerto Rican-American or Puertorriqueño? We know the answer. Independencia.

Mr. Ocasio withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Alejandro Torres Rivera (Gran Oriente Interamericano de Puerto Rico) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Torres Rivera.

Mr. TORRES RIVERA (interpretation from Spanish): My name is Alejandro Torres Rivera and I am Secretary for Foreign Relations of the Gran

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Oriente Interamericano de Puerto Rico. I am accompanied by our brother Irvin Flores from the Upper House of the Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico, and our brother Homero Rosado, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supremo Consejo del Grado 33, Jurisdicción Universal de Norte del los Estados Unidos de America.

On 28 August 1972, the United Nations Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples recognized the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960. This determination represented a denunciation of the fraud to which this high international forum was subjected by General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII) of 27 November 1953.

The colonial situation of our country has been brought before this Committee for consideration year after year. Throughout this period the Committee has had the opportunity to hear the views of representatives of all political and ideological groups and sectors which make up the political, social, economic and cultural panorama of our country and to conclude the following: the people of Puerto Rico has not yet been able to exercise fully its right to self-determination and independence and as a consequence, recognition of our right to complete freedom, to the exercise of self-determination and to sovereignty over our national territory; recognition of the right of the people of Puerto Rico to change their present status; recognition of the right of our people to exercise absolute control over its natural resources; recognition of the right of our people to a democratic process through its own mechanisms and based on the prior total transfer by the Government of the United States of all the powers which it has at this

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time but which belong to a sovereign people; recognition of the existence and the demand for the cessation of all persecution, harassment and repressive measures which have been regularly carried out against the people and organizations advocating independence for our country - an activity which is a violation of the national rights of our people to self-determination and independence; recognition of the right of our people to recover from the United States all our national territory; recognition of the existence of political prisoners held by the United States Government; denunciation of the inaction on the part of the United States Government in the face of the need to adopt concrete measures for the total transfer of powers to our people; affirmation that any consultation process with respect to status should presuppose previous recognition of the sovereignty of the Puerto Rican people in its right to conduct such negotiations and procedures in conditions of full political equality; demand for the cessation of military manoeuvres by the United States Army in Puerto Rico and suspension of the National Guard of Puerto Rico in other Central American countries, cessation of the militarization of the country and use by the United States Government of repressive measures against independence movements by the federal grand jury; requirement for an investigating mission from this Committee to be authorized by the United States Government to gather information in Puerto Rico; denunciation of the practice by the United States Government of prohibiting Puerto Rican citizens from travelling to third countries for sports competitions; and recognition of the Latin American character and identity of our people and its culture.

It is not only this forum that has dealt with and expressed concern about the colonial tragedy of Puerto Rico. The colonial situation of Puerto Rico was stressed at the international Masonic meeting held from 9 to

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11 November 1990 on the island of St. Martin, in the Eastern Caribbean, and the demand was expressed that any consultation on political status of Puerto Rico should be carried out in accordance with international law and under United Nations supervision.

As recently as last July, the Latin American Presidents meeting at the Guadalajara Summit in Mexico, spoke of the need to put an end to colonialism in the hemisphere and recognized the Latin American character of Puerto Rico. It identified our people as an example of peoples which still have not achieved self-determination.

Despite this and other denunciations, the United States Government continues to violate the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence. Thus, the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 22 November 1988, proclaiming the period 1990 to 2000 as International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism has meant nothing to that Government.

Notwithstanding centuries of oppression and interference by foreign Powers, the Puerto Rican people has been able to maintain its capacity not only to resist but also to struggle. The Masonic patriotic movement has been involved throughout that struggle, in all the trenches of those activities. We do not claim that this forum should assume the responsibility that is ours with regard to successfully completing out emancipation process. All we ask is that this Committee, recognizing our existence, exercise its mandate without ambiguity and thus recommend to the General Assembly that it pronounce itself in favour of our right as a people to self-determination and independence as well as seek the immediate implementation by the United States Government of its obligations and the immediate transfer to our people of the sovereign powers that that Government has usurped from our people.

(Mr. Torres Rivera)

Since 1972, the Government of the United States in Puerto Rico, far from ceasing its interference, has intensified it politically and economically. At the same time, it has developed and perfected its direct repressive tactics against the various manifestations of the independence struggle in our country and in its own continental territory. The Committee will recall that its draft resolutions of 12 September 1978, 15 August 1979, 16 August 1980, 24 August 1983 and 17 August 1988 specifically recognized the oppressive presence of the United States Government in Puerto Rico and United States policies aimed at persecuting, oppressing and imprisoning those who fight for independence, as well as the violation of the civil and political rights of tens of thousands of independence advocates. This situation is continuing. Excessive prison terms are being served in United States jails by 18 political prisoners and prisoners of war who have already been imprisoned for more than 10 years. The Government of the United States has used the most sophisticated techniques of psychological torture and behaviour modification against them. Their "crime" has been merely to exercise the right to fight for the independence of their country. Other pro-independence patriots are also awaiting trial in United States federal courts made up of United States judges and officials, where they expect that, on the basis of discrimination against them as independence advocates and as Puerto Ricans, they will be convicted. The repressive agencies of the federal Government and the agencies of the colonial government are maintaining the same discriminatory and repressive policies.

An essential prerequisite for any legitimate decolonization process is total and unconditional amnesty for all those who are imprisoned or facing trial or are in other ways treated as criminals or persecuted because of their political ideas. Consequently the Committee should, as part of its

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pronouncements, demand the total, immediate and unconditional release of those patriots and the cessation of any repressive proceedings against them. There can be no legitimate decolonization process while our patriots are still being oppressed and jailed. There will not be a minute of rest in our bodies until we achieve their freedom. The Gran Oriente Interamericano de Puerto Rico, the Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico and the Supremo Consejo del Grado 33, Jurisdicción Universal del Norte de los Estados Unidos de América, defending the motto of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", are appearing this year before the Committee, requesting it to submit to the General Assembly the content and scope of its previous resolutions on the case of Puerto Rico, to call for United States compliance with international law in every aspect of our case and to demand the total and immediate release of our political prisoners and prisoners of war, as well as the cessation of the judicial procedures against our patriots.

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!

Mr. Torres Rivera withdrew.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Carlos Piñeiro (Comité de Afirmación Puertorriqueña) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on Mr. Piñeiro.

Mr. PINEIRO (interpretation from Spanish): This is another year when lofty speeches, both on legal matters and on moral and ethical matters, delivered by Puerto Rican patriots, will fill this forum with fettered hopes. Other speeches, verging on the vulgar, delivered by would-be Yankees, will present the shameful face of the colonized.

As spokesman of those Puerto Ricans who have suffered most from the colonialization, of my country, that is, as a Puerto Rican living in the

(Mr. Piñeiro)

United States, a product of its ghettos, a victim of hunger-driven migration, of despair, of political persecution and of governmental programmes and policies that have uprooted the finest of our nation's sons and have brought us to a life of appalling suffering on a daily basis in urban centres infected with drugs, AIDS, infant mortality, unemployment, homelessness, hopelessness and desolation, I can say that the greatest crime committed against my people is the crime of silence - the silence of those who pay lip-service to democracy but are silent about Yankee genocide against Puerto Rico. Or perhaps they stuff their mouths with dollars and, drowning in corruption, they lose the decency and sense of shame that are necessary for justice to prevail.

I may be breaking with established protocol but the truth must not be bound by the heartlessness of everyday formalities; it must be filled with passion, so as to move those who for so long have been deaf to our cause. Puerto Rico is a nation that refuses to succumb to the persistent depredation perpetrated by the Yankee Government. In our archipelago, drugs introduced by those barbarians are destroying our young people; their vile experiments have been aimed at reducing our population through the mass sterilization of our women; and there is a high crime rate caused by a widespread psychosis, reflecting the social deterioration resulting from a change of values in the process of assimilation that they are imposing on us with utmost brazenness, which is comparable only to the genocide that they committed against their indigenous population.

In practice, this change in values means the criminalization of patriotism. Federal jails serve as torture centres for our fighters. Artists, poets, lawyers, labour, men and women of the highest stature, are being imprisoned for fulfilling their duty: conspiring to free their

(Mr. Piñeiro)

country. Is this what they call democracy? Yet the international organizations remain silent, while Alejandrina Torres is slowly being murdered in United States dungeons. Where is justice? What could they say to Guillermo Morales, who gave his hands for his people, who now lives in exile and yearns to return to his liberated homeland? Only silence. What reply will they give to the statement made in this forum last year by Commander Filiberto Ojeda Rios, who then had to go underground? Only a shameful silence has been the response. But his will of steel cannot be broken, and his heroic struggle reaches into the mountains of my lonely country.

Thus we must ask: what arguments are needed to convince the world of the justice of our struggle for independence? How many more times will we have to come here to ask for justice? How many Ponce massacres will there be, how many Cerro Maravillas will we have to endure, how many Grand Juries will we have to resist? Don Pedro Albizu Campos said that the homeland is courage and sacrifice. But he also told us that in order to take our homeland, they will have to take our lives. Let us hope that in this supposed new world order, our people will not have to continue to struggle in ways which we have under international law to defend our freedom but which are not very pleasant. We believe that if the laws promulgated by this body are implemented, justice will be on our side. However, we are prepared to do justice with our own hands. If the Yankees think they can do everything, if they think they can quiet our demands with their dollars, they should remember the attack on Congress, the insurrection of 1950 or Sabana Seca. All their foul tricks will always be answered.

(Mr. Piñeiro)

On Cuba, stoic in the face of the constant spying to which it is subjected by the Yankees, has been equal to the task and has not been afraid to denounce the abuses suffered by my people. If Bolivar were alive today, he would feel terribly ashamed. And farther away, behind comrade Mao, dead in body but clear, profound and upright in his thoughts, looks upon us with sadness. The conspiracy of silence is faceless but is seen by all. It is financed by dollars and silences virtues that should not have a price on them. My Puerto Pobre, as Neruda called Puerto Rico not "Rich Port" but "Poor Port" - has been sullied, betrayed by the Judases who have lost all sense of decency. But I remain hopeful that some day the chains will be broken and at least a little decency will enter the hearts of those who have a duty and must do it.

Members of the Committee, in this decade, which you have declared the decade of decolonization, I urge you to adopt a resolution that will bring the case of Puerto Rico before the General Assembly. And may that historic event, which will break the silence that has concealed the colonial realities of my homeland, serve as a lesson to teach the Yankees and their proconsuls that dignity will always prevail over their imperial power.

Long live free Puerto Rico! Freedom for our political prisoners and for our prisoners of war!

Mr. Piñeiro withdrew.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.